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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP MEETS WITH
CODEL ENGEL

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 0225 (B) BUENOS AIRES 0226

11. (SBU) Summary and introduction: Codel Engel had a warm and productive meeting with Argentine Vice President (and Senate President) Cobos and other congressional leaders. They discussed Iran, energy, Argentina's economic recovery, the environment, and the positive feelings following their meeting with President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK). The codel conveyed concern about Iranian activities in Bolivia, congratulated Cobos on the country's economic recovery, looked forward to cooperation on energy and the environment, and highlighted the close connection formed during the previous day's meeting with the President. Argentine representatives reaffirmed their commitment to fighting terrorism, their position on Iran, and also noted the past five years of economic growth, and encouraged codel members to depart with this picture of a revived country. End summary.

12. (SBU) VP Julio Cobos, Senate Leader of the Victory Front (FPV) bloc Miguel Pichetto, and Sen. Horacio Lores, and President of the Chamber of Deputies Eduardo Fellner and Deputy Agustin Rossi met in a Senate office building on February 25 with Rep. Eliot Engel, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Rep. Jerry Weller, Rep. Gene Green, Rep. Maurice Hinchey, and Rep. Virginia Foxx.

Positive Meeting with the President

13. (SBU) Senate President Cobos welcomed the codel, commenting that the visit had raised great interest within the GOA and Argentine Congress. He looked forward to exchanging views on bilateral relations, common interests, and international policy, and asked about the previous day's meeting with President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK).

14. (SBU) Rep. Engel said the codel's meeting with the president was a frank and substantive conversation that brought to light many similarities and resulted in a personal connection. He hoped that the visit would pave a new road for closer relations, as the United States and Argentina share much in common -- being large, diverse, and composed of people from all over the world -- and are natural allies and friends.

Presence of Iran

15. (SBU) Rep. Weller stated that the codel was united in a bipartisan desire to improve relations, and expressed his gratitude for the GOA's partnership on counter-narcotics, terrorism, and Haiti. He expressed concern about Bolivia

permitting the building of an Iranian television station to broadcast propaganda.

Trafficking in Persons (TIP)

¶6. (SBU) Rep. Foxx said she was pleased to learn that the Argentine Constitution was modeled after the US Constitution. She congratulated Argentina's Congress on its daily work for the people of the country, and encouraged the legislature to pass the TIP legislation currently under consideration. Rep. Foxx said the issue was of great interest to the U.S. Congress.

Argentina's support in the war on terror

¶7. (SBU) Sen. Pichetto recalled a previous codel two years ago led by Sen. John McCain, which resulted in a rich exchange of ideas related to international trade and human rights. He voiced the Legislature's interest in deepening relations with the U.S. Congress and sharing information between Congressional committees on topics such as narcotics, TIP, and terrorism. Ambassador Wayne and Argentine Ambassador Timerman would play key roles in building this relationship. Regarding support for the war on terror, Pichetto reminded the codel of recent legislation passed by the Argentine Congress criminalizing terrorism and the money laundering that funds it. He also reiterated the point made by former President Kirchner in his speech at the United Nations last year criticizing Iran for its failure to cooperate in the investigation of the 1994 AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires, and reminded everyone that Argentina's president did not go to Venezuela when President Ahmadinejad visited.

Argentina's economic recovery

¶8. (SBU) Deputy Rossi discussed the country's turbulent recent past. Five years ago, he recounted, a president stepped down before the end of his term, 60% of people lived below the poverty line, and 24% were unemployed. From that institutional and social crisis, Argentina was able to rebuild to its current state, creating over 3.4 million jobs in four-and-a-half years and lowering poverty levels. The GOA rebuilt the institution of the presidency, developed an independent Supreme Court, and ensured that Congress would vote on laws following its convictions rather than external influences. He stated that the current situation reflects the hard work of government, businesses, and the public, and that the Legislature wanted to unite with other countries who want to work for a more equal world.

Energy

¶9. (SBU) Rep. Green congratulated the GOA on the country's economic growth and affirmed the cooperation that already exists between the two countries. He discussed his experience watching Texas diversify to satisfy its energy needs and noted that reasonably priced energy was critical for driving future economic growth. With that in mind, he looked forward to cooperating with Argentina on energy matters.

¶10. (SBU) Sen. Lores said he was a member of the Energy Committee in the Argentine Senate, and came from a province (Neuquen) that produced 50% of the gas, 20% of the oil, and 15% of the hydroelectric power in the country. He said he was not a member of the majority, but supports the legislative changes it is making and is optimistic about the future given the strong recovery of the past five years.

¶11. (SBU) Rep. Hinchey also congratulated the GOA representatives on the country's social and economic

improvements and voiced his concerns with respect to energy. He commented that the United States has far less oil in reserves than what it uses on a daily basis, and believed that Argentina faced a similar situation. For this reason, and also because of environmental concerns, he stressed the importance of renewable energy sources, particularly solar energy. He said his district established a Solar Energy Consortium bringing together universities and private companies. He thought the United States and Argentina could learn much from one another and establish similar partnerships.

Building ties between the U.S. and Argentina

¶12. (SBU) Rep. Engel reminded the GOA representatives that a presidential election would soon take place in the United States, and that, regardless of the person/party elected, there would be policy changes. He stated his intent to discuss Latin American policy with whomever was in office. At the same time, there was much that could be done by both legislatures to facilitate deepening relations. Rep. Engel also affirmed that points of disagreement between administrations, such as Argentina's financial and energy relationship with Chavez, did not preclude a closer relationship between the USG and Argentina.

¶13. (SBU) VP Cobos agreed that strengthening U.S. - Argentine relations was extremely important, and said the country was also working to strengthen regional relations through MERCOSUR. The issues raised in the meeting, such as energy, the environment, etc., go beyond the borders of the two countries. Argentina is making concerted efforts to promote energy projects to meet the growing demand of industry and raise standards of living. The GOA is instituting a rational energy use plan, supplementing it with alternatives, including biodiesel, wind, and solar. He hoped future U.S. administrations will also work to strengthen bilateral relations, looking deeper at Latin America so that a cooperative effort can be made to address domestic and global issues.

¶14. (U) Codel Engel cleared this cable.

KELLY